

COALITION



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Issue 58

El Salvador:

***A Chapter of its
Cuscatlan Battalion Closes***

Interview with Brigadier General

Arne Skjaerpe

Back to School

BULLETIN



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Cover photo: - *Back to School* - Students of the Huda girls school patiently await the official reopening of the school in Tarmiyah, Northwest of Baghdad.

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Cover Photo: Back to School, by Sgt. 1 Class Christina Batti. Courtesy of mnf-iraq.com

Design:
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“J’admire beaucoup moins Napoléon depuis que je sais ce qu’est une coalition” (I admire much less Napoleon since I know what a coalition is)

Marechal FOCH, 1918, commander in chief of the Western Front and in charge of the coordination of the operations conducted by all the allied armed forces.

To be at the head of a coalition represents a real challenge as General McKiernan, Commander of ISAF, said during their Chief of Staff Change of Command ceremony. He said “It’s not easy to be Chief of Staff of an organization represented by 41 nations, with different cultures and languages and keep them moving in one direction”.

Nowadays, there is no longer a unilateral response under the lead of a unique nation, whatever the mandate may be, UN, NATO, EU. It is a fact and fortunately, nations have anticipated from numerous years. At the tactical level, troops trained together during dedicated multinational exercises and check the equipments and procedures interoperability in an environment as close as the one they will encounter in the future operations they will conduct (culture, terrain...). At the staff level, officers and NCOs are trained to work together with common procedures and on professional side, officers are sent to foreign military academies to let them confront ideas and share culture and way of life. Then they may be more integrated when working within a coalition or as liaison.

Here in Tampa, more than 60 nations are working with General Petraeus, commander US Central Command. It is not the Coalition, as Brigadier General Skarpje said in an interview in our bulletin, “the Coalition means all those soldiers, airmen and sailors out there conducting operations within CENTCOM area of responsibility fighting terrorism and extremism”. That said, he is the coordinator of this unique “mini United Nations” which adds a tremendous capacity in day to day ops with US CENTCOM.

Whatever the command level or the role is, the work of all these men and women has a unique aim, the achievement of the overall mission.

Brigadier General Gilles Lemoine
Chairman of the Public Affairs Working Group
Coalition Coordination Center (CCC)

Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony

KABUL, Afghanistan - On 3 January 2009, General David D. McKiernan, ISAF Commander officiated the ISAF Chief of Staff Change of Command Ceremony in Kabul. After about one year serving at International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters as the Chief of Staff, German Major General Hans-Lothar Domrose was relieved by Italian Major General Marco Bertolini.



Major General Marco Bertolini

“It’s not easy to be Chief of Staff of an organization represented by 41 nations, with different cultures and languages and keep them moving in one direction,” General McKiernan said. “We want to welcome Major General Bertolini who will be as strong a leader as Major General Domrose has been.”

In the last years prior to his deployment to ISAF, General Bertolini served as Commander of the Airborne Brigade “FOLGORE”, from September 2002 to July 2004. Promoted to his current rank, he was then appointed as Commander of the Joint Special Operations Command in Rome from July 2004 to September 2008.

U.S. Turns Control of International Zone Over to Iraq

WASHINGTON – The United States formally transferred the Republican Palace back to the Iraqi government, a concrete symbol of the continuing improvement in the country. The transfer came about as the status of forces agreement between the United States and Iraq took effect. The agreement replaces the UN’s mandate under which the coalition went into Iraq and has conducted operations there since. Under the agreement, Iraqi forces are now in the lead with U.S. forces in a supporting role or in overwatch.

ISAF, Additional Measures to Avoid Civilian Casualties

In his first press briefing with journalists in 2009, NATO Spokesman James Appathurai presented the recently issued Tactical Directive as a key step in ISAF’s efforts to avoid civilian casualties. Appathurai highlighted the new Tactical Directive in which the COMISAF, General McKiernan, underscores the ongoing ISAF objective of partnering with the ANSF in order to defeat the insurgency and maintain the support of Afghan people.

US CENTCOM Commander Sends Congratulations on Iraqi Elections



An Iraqi man holds up an ink-stained finger after casting his vote in the country's provincial elections in Basra, Iraq, Saturday, January 31.

Statement of General David H. Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command, and former Commander, Multi-National Force-Iraq on provincial elections held in Iraq on 31 January 2009:

"Congratulations to the Iraqi Government, the Iraqi Security Forces, the Iraqi people, the United Nations, the international observers, and Coalition elements for their concerted efforts in making today's provincial elections an event of which all Iraqis should be proud and an effort the world should applaud. While not without incident, today's elections are a cause for celebration as we salute the millions of Iraqi citizens who took to the streets to exercise their fundamental right to self-determination. As we honor the courage and resolve of the Iraqi people who walked miles to a polling station and braved long lines and security concerns, I know that I can speak for all those who have been privileged to work with our Iraqi partners in the "Land of the Two Rivers" in saying to the people of Iraq, "Mabruk!" (Congratulations!)."



El Salvador: A Chapter on its Cuscatlán Battalion's History Closes

It is with a great deal of pride, and utter satisfaction over the accomplished duties, that the Cuscatlán Battalion celebrated the End of Mission Ceremony at Al Kut, Iraq on January 22nd, 2009. El Salvador first responded to the United Nation's Security Council's calling through the 1483 Resolution, approved in May, 2003. By August 2003 to this date, the eleven contingents from El Salvador have provided hope, developed peace efforts and demonstrated a brotherly spirit to the people of Iraq.

"Cuscatlán Battalion," was the assigned name for this Legion of Peace; Cuscatlán, means "A place of Jewels" in Nahuatl, and it was the name given by the natives of El Salvador in the past. The battalion was on its way to be part of a humanitarian reconstruction of Iraq, and which in time, developed and combined into more than just a mission, but a mixture of new friendships, a rebirth of service spirit within themselves, and the notion and acknowledgements of various cultures; that being, one of the greatest legacies and accomplishments the contingents will treasure in each member's memory.

During their mission at Iraq, El Salvador contributed with eleven rotations; developing its mission in three important Iraqi cities: An Najaf initially, then at Al Hilla, Babil and finally at Al Kut, Wasit. Among the Salvadoran contributions, the task that dignified them the most and which by excellence was the most important step towards peace and stability is The Reconstruction and Humanitarian Aid for Iraq. They developed 319 reconstruction projects regarding improving electricity systems, health, education, transportation, agriculture, farming and water services on top of providing equipment and resources to several institutions specially schools and clinics. Likewise, El Salvador provided Humanitarian aid on its responsibility zones, handing out food packages, clothes, school supplies, wheelchairs and many other items that came in handy to the townspeople and benefiting over seven million Iraqis.


Also, El Salvador's troops executed over 21,000 patrols, 200 quick reactions responds, 150 improvised explosive device detections, 600 supply convoy escorts, Iraqi Police training and



Control Checkpoints among the different roads.

All of these actions earned the respect, appreciation, and care of the Iraqi People towards the Salvadoran troops. Their hard work, will, dedication and service calling made every single member of the Cuscatlán Battalion and its contingents, Men of Bravery. That is why today, as the Cuscatlán Battalion redeployment to its home country El Salvador, we can welcome them proudly and joyfully feel the satisfaction of an accomplished mission; with their heads up high, their chests filled with triumph. In addition, the Battalion manifests the strength and bravery of five Salvadoran Heroes whose lives were lost during this global war on terrorism and fifty-five soldiers who due to several causes, resulted injured.

The Iraqi People and all of the Multinational Coalition recognize El Salvador as a friend country; a country of brave, professional soldiers, with a great deal of human quality, honorable and brotherly. This new ties of fraternal friendship contributed incredibly to create a stable environment with stronger levels of security in every zone. El Salvador troops are now leaving back home, but their mission, their everlasting support and most importantly, their commitment to the cause will always live within themselves.

May God bless the Iraqi people, every country of the Multinational Coalition, and the Republic of El Salvador! 

* * * * *



Story and Pictures Courtesy of
COL. Cesar Acosta (BCXI CDR
COL. Hector Erazo (El Salvador SNR)



Polish Forces, Long Time Partners in Afghan Front Lines

*Story Courtesy of
Specialist Mary L. Gonzalez
CJTF-101 Public Affairs*

Photo by US Army Spc. Alan Moos



BAGRAM AIR FIELD, Afghanistan – Polish forces have just days into the fight after taking over authority of Ghazni province, on 1 November, as a partner in the U.S.-led Combined Joint Task Force-101.

“Our mission is exactly the same as the other forces here,” said Brigadier General Janusz Adamczak, deputy commanding general for Coalition in Afghanistan. “We support the security and stability; we support the government and support the development of the province.”

In Ghazni, the Polish Task Force’s main goal for the province is a key factor in the stabilization of the country. Highway One, a large portion of the vast Ring Road that winds in a giant circle in Afghanistan, is 800 km. of the Ring Road’s 3,000 km. Highway One connects Kandahar, an important religious hub for many in Afghanistan, to Kabul, the capital and heart of the country. The Polish troop’s main focal point is security for the 200 km. section of the road that passes through Ghazni and Ghazni City, a large commerce area.

“Highway One has great strategic and operational value in Afghanistan,” said Brigadier General Mark A. Milley, deputy commanding general for operations in CJTF-101 and Regional Command-East. “The enemy has attempted to shut it down, but has failed multiple times. One of the reasons Highway One in Regional Command-East is more secure today is the skill and courage of the Polish Battle Group.”

Adamczak said there are several contributing factors to their success.

“It’s not only us working there, CJTF-101 has been very successful in guarding the border to Pakistan,” said

Adamczak. “This prevents the insurgents from coming into Afghanistan and even getting to Highway One. It’s also due to the greater number of troops available. After we took authority of Ghazni, the previous task force was able to focus their efforts on other areas, including the border. Another thing is the number of patrols we conduct along the highway to ensure the enemy is not setting any IEDs.”

The Polish Forces have doubled their head count in Afghanistan, from a battalion-sized to a brigade-sized element.

Just prior to their transfer of authority for their new battle space, several American battalions had a Polish company attached to them, and there were two U.S. companies attached to the headquarters of the Polish battalion, creating a

very integrated and combined effort.

Previously these forces were in Paktika, Paktya, Parwan and Ghazni provinces. Then in October they increased to a brigade sized element. With this decision to deploy more troops to increase the size of their force in Afghanistan, came the ability to take command of an entire battle space.

Fighting in the war on terror is not a new experience for the Polish military. Polish forces first deployed to Afghanistan as a small engineer detachment of 170 troops that conducted demining operations for various air fields including Bagram Air Field in Parwan province, the headquarters for CJTF-101.


“We have worked in cooperation here in Afghanistan since 2003,” said Adamczak. “We had smaller numbers then, but we were here from the beginning.” 



Photo by US Army Spc. Micah E. Clare

EXPLOSIVES DISPOSAL IN KUNDUZ

The number of interventions is rising

The insurgents are making an extensive use of improvised explosive devices to ambush coalition forces or Afghan security forces and civilians. As a consequence of this, the number of intervention of the Belgian explosive ordnance disposal team of Provisional Reconstruction Team (PRT) Kunduz is rising.

The bomb disposal experts of PRT are responsible for the explosive ordnance disposal and for the dismantlement of the improvised bombs. The results of two and an half months of collection are stored in the storage container: one ton of old and abandoned weapons waiting for destruction. We can find among them some famous “Stalin’s organ” rockets, artillery shells and rifle grenades. “They are often Russian made”, the team leader Command Sergeant Major Filip Rogge specifies. The insurgents are using artillery shells to improve the destruction power of the improvised explosive devices. They also already launched a rocket attack on the compound of the PRT.



Disintegrated


From the bank of an ‘oued’, a drained river, Filip is over watching the surrounding areas. It is already the 10th times that him and his team is coming on this spot to make ammunition explode. This place has been chosen due to his proximity with the compound of the PRT and because that the routes to access can be easily controlled. Even from a safety distance, the explosives can be easily over watched. “The heaviest projectile defines the maximum range of the shrapnel’s while the power of the blast depends on the total weight of explosives.” he explains.

The countdown is started: “Three... Two... One... Fire!” In a deafening detonation, more than 80 kilogram’s of grenades are disappearing. “We try to destroy those devices as soon as possible. This in order to avoid accidents and especially to ensure that this will not fall into unauthorized hands”, the Command Sergeant Major explains further.

“ThEODor”

Under command of Captain Nicolas De Clerck the team already intervened 18 times for improvised explosive device disposal purposes. “Within the last two months we went out four more times that the previous team went out during his four months long tour”, he notices. He also confirms the trend which is perceived around the whole Afghanistan: the insurgents are laying more and more improvised bombs in holes on the routes or under bridges.

“When the local population, the Afghan Police or our own patrols are finding such devices, the PRT Commander send us on the spot”, the Captain explains. The problem is often solved thanks to the use of “ThEODor” the robot. But if the main charge is concealed in an inaccessible place, the human intervention becomes mandatory. Unfortunately, the team assisted by the German Military Police has sometimes to inquire into successful attacks. The German soldiers regret the death of one of their comrades and suffered several wounded in action.

Additionally to its participation into the PRT of Kunduz, Belgian troops are also present in Kabul, providing security of the Kabul International Airport, and in Kandahar, with a F-16 detachment in support of the ISAF troops. Other Belgians are also embedded within the HQ ISAF and the HQ RC-Capital. In total, near of 500 Belgian troops are deployed in Afghanistan. 

Interview with Brigadier General Arne Skjaerpe

Brigadier General Arne Skjaerpe assumed the position of Coalition Chairman in July 2007.

Trained as an artillery officer in the Norwegian Army, he has served around 30 years in various military portfolios in Norway and around the world for different operations. Prior to this appointment of Norway's Senior National Representative to the Coalition, he was the Chief of Norway Army Staff in Oslo. He is married with three children.

Major Cristian Popovici, Romanian's Media Officer representative in the Coalition Public Affairs Team, took the opportunity to hear the general's perspectives as he concludes his tenure as the Chairman of the Coalition.



*Brigadier General Arne Skjaerpe
Norwegian Senior National Representative
Chairman of Coalition (2007 - 2008)*

Q: Sir, you have been the Chairman of the Coalition for eighteen months. Could you explain to our readers what the Coalition and the Coordination Center deals with and what your position means.

BG. Skjaerpe: First, I would like to remind us all that the Coalition is not just CENTCOM HQ and various representatives here in Tampa. In fact, the Coalition is all those soldiers, airmen and sailors out there conducting operations within CENTCOM's AOR fighting terrorism and extremism.

The Coalition Coordination Center (CCC) is this staff section of the US CENTCOM CCIJ5 which has the task to deal with Coalition nations and to coordinate all relevant activities with them. This ranges from not only taking care and coordinate the liaison offices activities here in Tampa but also more important; identify, validate and support other nations force contribution that could be available or could be relevant for the Coalition.

The Coalition Chairman is a coordinator. I have been supporting the other nation's coordination within the Coalition in cooperation with the American hosts. This ranges from operational coordination to all the practical issues supporting those more than 60 nations being represented here.

We should be aware that the Coalition is very unique in many ways because of the number of nations represented. The Coalition has all parts of the world represented. We represent different political systems, we have countries with

different religions and of course also different points of view related to the conflicts we are involved in.

In my perspective, I see this as a mini United Nations - with all its challenges, but more important, with all its values added into it. When I look at it now, it is clear that all those delegations, manned by very professional and experienced officers, add a tremendous capacity in day to day co-operations with US CENTCOM.

Q: Sir, we all know that USA is leading in this Global War on Terror. You are one of the Senior Representatives of the contributing countries. How important do you see the support of the other nations in this war?

The importance of these more than 60 nations can be seen from different perspectives: first of all I believe it is important, from the political perspective. The Coalition, made of 60 nations, gives it legitimacy and is a strong sign of both political and military support in fighting against terrorism and extremism in the world. Countries around the world may have different views towards some of these issues, but the bottom line is that all the countries have agreed to do something about it.

It is also important in another perspective – the professional military one. The presence of national representatives here help and increase the military efficiency of the day-to-day operations. Some nations are heavily involved in the operations together with the US and some others are here merely to represent their government's support. It is a wide range of countries. Even though we talk about the Coalition as one big group of nations, we also have to be aware that each nation have signed their national agreement with US in terms of their capacity of commitment and those agreements differ from country to country.

Q: The last year was a difficult one for the Coalition. They worked very hard to manage the security in Iraq. What is your opinion towards the situation there?

I am very happy being able to observe the military and the political development in Iraq over the last 12 months. We see a lot of improvements and it is my sincere hope that this process will continue and the Iraqi authorities and people will eventually assume full responsibilities for their own country. That will give the US and the coalition partners who are still there, the possibility to gradually reduce their forces and their presence in Iraq.

As we know, there is an agreement signed between the US and the Iraqi government for the American forces to be out of Iraq by 2011. This will have the consequences, of course, parts of the Coalition will be reduced. We must not forget that the Coalition, by its nature, is an *ad-hoc* organization – limited in time and scope. When the aims and objectives are fulfilled, it is time to go home again. We should all be happy when we can say to our soldiers “mission accomplished and welcome back home”.

Q: Most of the Coalition countries have already pulled out the troops from Iraq and yet some of the remaining countries are considering completing their mission by the middle of the year. In Afghanistan there are not many Coalition troop as there is a NATO mandate. Do you think this is the end of the Coalition or is just the end of a phase of it?

Let me start by saying a few words about Afghanistan: as I have said, we have seen a very positive development in Iraq. There are also a lot of positive signs in Afghanistan. Let us not forget that if we compare Afghanistan today with what it was five years ago, there is a tremendous improvement in many areas. However we still see a lot of challenges, not only in the security area, but also in the

perspective of having a real, credible, realistic and comprehensive approach to rebuild the country. And that means every step we do in the security area has to be followed – not sequentially but in parallel - with development and governance. We also are facing huge challenges concerning narcotics corruption.

Let me also be quite clear: I personally think that we should not have the mentality of “we will win” in Afghanistan. Is that the right message to the Afghani people? If anybody should “win” there, it must be the Afghani people and a functioning Afghan government which is capable of supporting their people. We should be very careful to impose any type of governance on a nation which is not based on their history and tradition. In its purest form it is about supporting all efforts to prevent Afghanistan of being a sanctuary and a breeding ground for terrorism again. I think this is very important and also should be one of the driving factors in our future efforts there.

Having said this, I feel certain, even though NATO is responsible for most of the military operations there and will

be for more years, the development in Afghanistan has shown that the Coalition still is very relevant. We should always seek to have the broadest possible basis for our military engagements and not limit it. That means that nations who would like to participate and support this effort, outside the framework of NATO and

“The Coalition is all those soldiers, airmen and sailors out there conducting operations within CENTCOM’s AOR, fighting terrorism and extremism.”

ISAF, also should be welcomed. This approach also gives the nations there the flexibility of employing their military forces, and how to engage with Afghanistan.

The US is by far the biggest force provider and they are bearing the brunt of the battle in Afghanistan. That will increase in the coming months and years. This substantial increase in American presence in Afghanistan will also increase the importance of CENTCOM as being next higher HQ for all the American forces operating in Afghanistan. It should be in every nation’s interest to continue their presence with professional representatives at this HQ.

Q: We are amid a global financial and economic turmoil, the military expenses are declining and recent Gaza conflict ignited the political debates. Might all of these circumstances endanger the sustainability of the mission we still have there?

This is a battle we cannot give up and we will not give up. Having said that, it is also clear that the financial turbulences and economic recession we are in the middle of, could have some negative consequences. This will surely have an influence on how much resources each nation can allocate

“I feel certain that all Coalition representatives will go back to their home countries richer in terms of military experience, intercultural experience and friendship.”

to the military. But I feel relatively certain even though we see challenges in the financial area, most nations will step up and provide both forces and resources, especially for Afghanistan. It will be very important now that all nations, not only the US and some key allies, but also other nations contribute with enough resources to help the Afghans build their own country again.

Q: As the chairman, your role requires you to interact with the various communities in Tampa Bay. What is the experience like and how important was that interaction for the Coalition?

Primarily the Coalition countries representatives are here in Tampa working with CENTCOM on a military mission. We are here to support, coordinate, report back home and to liaise with the US military authorities in ongoing operations.

We are also here as “ambassadors” for our countries and I’m very happy and pleased by the outreach activities we’ve been doing here. We have been welcomed in an exceptionally good way by Tampa Bay population. We are received with friendship, support and respect. Many nations and their military systems and governments can learn a lot from America today and see how much they appreciate and value their armed forces and their sacrifices.

The way America is taking care of their wounded soldiers is also very impressive. I think many the national representatives will go back to their countries with deep, good impressions and good ideas about how that can be improved in their countries.

I also think the fact that we have been actively engaging with the Tampa civilian community, has contributed to show

the American people that they are not fighting these wars alone. There are many nations out there which share our common values.

Q: If you could describe the Coalition Coordination Center (CCC) in three words, what would they be?

Throughout my time here, I have had the pleasure, both as a Norwegian Senior National Representative and especially as a Coalition Chairman, to work closely with and become friends with the senior commanders here. Admiral Fallon, General Dempsey and now General Petraeus, are all outstanding professional officers and the best possible representatives of USA.


The CCC in my perspective is a highly professional organization. They are doing a very important job, and the officers here are very good friends and colleagues. They support us in the best possible way.

I’m also extremely impressed by the quality of the officers and given the complexity of the CENTCOM AOR and the possible threats and problems that could occur, this HQ is doing a remarkable job...

Q: At the end of your tenure, do you have a message for the Coalition members?

All Coalition national representatives should bring back to their capitals and defense staffs the message that even though the Coalition will change,

there is still a requirement for being represented here at CENTCOM.

At the end of my time as the Coalition Chairman I would like to thank all the members of the Coalition and CCC for helping me to do my part of the job. I also thank them for what they are doing on behalf of their countries, coming here and working together. I feel certain that all Coalition representatives will go back to their home countries richer in terms of military experience, intercultural experience and friendship. 

* * * * *

In December 2008, Brigadier General Arne Skjaerpe handed over the position of Coalition Chairman to New Zealand Senior National Representative, Air Commodore Richard Newlands.



Abu-Ghraib Hospital Lights the Way

ABU GHRAIB — For the first time in many years, the Abu Ghraib Hospital recently turned on its lights without having to count down the hours until the lights went out again.

After several months of planning and work, the Hospital started receiving constant power through an 11kv power line that stretches nearly 1.5 km back to the Al Ban Substation.

The new power line is exempted from the load-shedding plan that forces substation operations to ration limited power to the various neighborhoods connected to it on a two hours on and a four hours off schedule, said Capt. Mark Gillman, a native of Las Vegas, who serves as an engineer, assigned to 2nd Stryker Brigade Combat Team “Warrior,” 25th Infantry Division, Multi-National Division – Baghdad.

With sufficient power, the more than two dozen physicians are now able to run basic services without disturbance, including laboratory equipment, refrigeration of medications and more complex neonatal incubators and echocardiograms, he explained.

Periodic stoppages throughout the day have long hindered treatment, particularly for inpatients. The 50-bed hospital is

the primary inpatient facility in west Baghdad and serves more than 200,000 residents from Khadamiyah to Balad.

The U.S.-funded project cost approximately \$200,000 and began in August, with the digging of a trench from the substation to the hospital and reinforcing certain areas of the trench to provide extra support for the line.

This electric line project is just one project of the hospital network, which is funded by both the United States and the government of Iraq.

“We are able to move forward on many projects now due to the increased security by the local security forces,” said a member of the Abu Ghraib Qada Council, after a meeting at governance center.

If not for the support and cooperation of various GoI offices to plan and approve the dedicated electric line, the hospital would have continued in its struggle to support a population of more than 300,000 people with the eight hours of sporadic power it received per day.

“I have been overjoyed at the support of the local government,” said Dr. Najh Noori Jaber, hospital director, “We have been in much need, and they have come through to help the people of Abu Ghraib.”



*Story Courtesy of
Cpt. Benjamin Roark
25th Infantry Division*



USFOR - AFGHANISTAN

Bridging Gaps for a Better Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan - A ribbon-cutting ceremony celebrating completion of the largest construction project of the year, took place on 30 December in Deh Rawood District, Uruzgon Province.

Over 250 people attended the opening of the Chutu Bridge, including local leaders, village elders and members of the coalition. The opening ceremony, officiated by the Deh Rawood district leader, began with a local Imam giving the invocation and concluded after a series of speeches by both Afghan and Coalition forces dignitaries.

Costing just over \$2 million and utilizing a crew of over two-dozen Afghan construction workers and ten coalition members the bridge was completed in less than six months. The bridge is expected to have a major impact on the economies of the local communities.



U.S. Army Gen. David McKiernan, Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan and Sayed Usman, Deh Rawood district Chief take part in cutting the ribbon to official open the Chutu Bridge in the Deh Rawood district, Uruzgon Province Dec. 30. The newly opened bridge is expected to provide an easier point for Afghan's to cross the Helmand River.


"The people of the area are very pleased that the coalition helped us build this bridge", said Sayed Usman, the Deh Rawood District chief.

"I thank you for making [this] bridge happen," said Surabi Ali Safari, Afghanistan Minister of Public Works while

New Bridge Opens in Uruzgun Province

KABUL, Afghanistan – Afghan dignitaries and General David McKiernan, Commander, U.S. Forces Afghanistan participated in a ceremony to open the recently completed Chutu bridge, today, in Deh Rawod district, located in Uruzgon Province, just over 100 km north of Kandahar. Local dignitaries participating in the ceremony included Sayeed Uzman, the Deh Rawood district chief, District Police Chief Omar Khan and Dr. Sorghab Ali Safari, Afghan's Minister of Public Works. In 2006, Coalition forces, working with local Afghan officials, identified a need to construct a bridge across the Helmand River. The newly completed bridge will serve to connect central Uruzgon province with the western half of the province as well as Helmand Province.


The old bridge was catastrophically damaged during the spring flooding season in 2007. "The completion of Chutu bridge serves as a symbol for local success, being built by Afghan hands to join Afghan communities," said Colonel O'Hara, a U.S. Forces spokesperson. "The bridge sends a strong message to insurgent strongholds in the region that the security and economic development of Afghanistan will not be stopped."

The building of the bridge began September of this year and was completed on 27 December. The estimated cost for building the bridge was just over \$850, 000. Over 300 local residents were on hand during the ceremony today. 

speaking to the elders of the area. "This [bridge] is what can come out of when we support the government [GIRoA] and the coalition."

"It's not my bridge it is not the government's bridge, it's your bridge," said General David McKeirnan, Commander of U.S. Forces Afghanistan. "Special Forces don't always just fight, they help build bridges too."

The rigid design of the Mabey-Johnson style bridge will facilitate an increase in commerce for thousands of Afghans in the Deh Rawood area and throughout the Uruzgon region by serving as a more convenient place for them to cross the Helmand river.

Additional security measures such as gates and guard stations will be added to help prevent accidents and overloading. 



GENERAL VOLLMER TAKES COMMAND OF RC NORTH

KABUL, Afghanistan - Brigadier General Juergen Weigt relinquished command of Regional Command (RC) North to Brigadier General Joerg Vollmer during a change of command ceremony in Mazar-e-Sharif, on 10 January.

"Today I will hand over the command of almost 4,500 outstanding soldiers," said General Weigt, during his speech. "I had the opportunity to serve in Northern Afghanistan for more than six months and during this period I have become highly attached to the Afghan population."

During General Weigt's command, he has been responsible for training the Afghan National Army, especially the build up of the 2nd Brigade of 209th Corps, as well as the Afghan National Police.

"Today I will leave this country convinced that things are looking up," he said. "I trust the establishment of governance legitimated by the Afghan people. Only a legally elected government is the precondition for continued international assistance."

General Vollmer entered the military in 1978 and just recently finished a tour as the commander of Armored Infantry Brigade 32.

"General Vollmer, I know that you meet all the requirements to take on these tasks and you are well prepared for the mission," said General Weigt, a native of Ochtendung, Germany. "I wish you the best and I am confident you will succeed in accomplishing this demanding mission."

"As the new commander of RC North I am pleased to take over from my predecessor today. I will make my contribution to the establishment of security in this part of Afghanistan. I am going to take over the work of my predecessor at the very point, where he left off", General Vollmer said, a native of Bremen, Germany.

"I am grateful to my predecessor for passing his experience to me and I will do my best to live up to the expectation entrusted to me," he added. **CB**



Lt. Gen. Karlheinz Viereck, German commander of German Operation Command, passes the flag of the German International Security Assistance Force contingent to Brig. Gen. Joerg Vollmer, the new commander of Regional Command North, during a change of command ceremony in Mazar-e-Sharif.

Vice President Joe Biden Tours Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan - Just before the recent inauguration U.S. Vice President Joe Biden continued his tour of military operations in the Middle East with a quick stop at International Security Assistance Force, Regional Command South Headquarters in Southern Afghanistan.

"I am very interested in what becomes of this region because it affects us all," Senator Biden said prior to the start of the briefing. Vice President Biden was accompanied by ISAF Commander, Gen. David McKiernan, as they discussed with Major General de Kruif



the future of southern Afghanistan, to include the addition of American troops later this year. During the briefing, Biden reaffirmed his pledge to fully support troops and their efforts in the region. **CB**

The Tripartite Commission Meeting



The Tripartite Commission composed of senior military representative from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Coalition Forces in Afghanistan, held twenty fifth meeting in Kabul, Afghanistan on 2 January 2009.

Delegations were headed by General Bismullah Khan, Chief of the General Staff Afghan National Army, General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Chief of Army Staff of Pakistan Army and General David D. McKiernan, Commander International Security Assistance Forces, Afghanistan.

The meeting reviewed the security situation in areas along the Pak – Afghan Border and discussed measures to improve the effectiveness of on going operations in the respective areas. They showed satisfaction at the existing level of cooperation. Earlier on arrival COAS met President Hamid Karzai on his special invitation.



General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Chief of Army Staff meeting with Afghan President Hamid Karzai during his visit to Kabul, Afghanistan.



General Ashfaq Parvez Kayani, Chief of Army Staff meeting with General Bismullah Khan, Chief of the General Staff Afghan National Army, during 25th Tripartite Commission Meeting held at Kabul, Afghanistan.

Provisional Reconstruction Team, Works to Improve Irrigation in Konar

Story and pictures
Courtesy of US Army

KABUL, Afghanistan – The Konar Provincial Reconstruction Team is working with Afghans in Manawara District to restore an irrigation system that fell into disrepair during decades of war in Afghanistan.

The ancient Karez system consists of 12 wells and numerous aqueducts which use river water and underground spring water to irrigate crops in the area. Soviets bombed the irrigation system in the 1980s to prevent Afghan fighters from transporting weapons and ammunition through the tunnels. The system has sustained other damage over time as well.

“The age, bombardment by the Soviets and its depth below the surface make it difficult to survey and repair the wells in Marawara District,” said Navy Lieutenant JG James Dietle. “The team believes there is a blockage in the tunnel preventing the water from getting to the crops. We are trying to help find and fix the kink.”

Local residents have taken an interest in the project and have shown their support to the PRT by assisting with inspections. Residents hope a rejuvenated irrigation system will increase crop yields.


“The locals are helping with the construction,” Dietle said. “We have not yet hired a contractor to help repair the Karez system. However, most contracts require 80 percent local work.”

Although the community would normally conduct the system’s maintenance, the PRT hopes to provide the



Members of the Konar Provincial Reconstruction Team speak with Afghan children during a mission in Manawara District, Konar province, Afghanistan.

necessary assistance to help the Karez irrigation system begin to work reliably again.

“This project has quickly become one of our favorites, it’s a relatively low-cost project with a measureable impact of improving irrigation to the community,” said Lieutenant Commander Robert Ross, Konar PRT commander. “Not to mention, this project is a high priority for the local government and the PRT. They will see the immediate benefit of their efforts in time for the spring planting season.” 

The CENTCOM Coalition Team Celebrates Qatar National Day





Coalition Senior National Representatives 2008